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WHAT IS THIS RELIGION

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very man must have a religion especially one which appeals to the intellectual mind. A man failing to observe religious principles becomes a danger to society. While there is no doubt that scientists and psychologists have widened our intellectual horizon, they have not been able to tell us our purpose in life, something a proper religion can do.

Man must choose a rational and meaningful religion according to his conviction without depending on mere beliefs, traditions, customs and theories. No one has the right to force him to accept any religion. No one should exploit poverty, illiteracy or arouse human emotional feelings to induce him to accept a religion. Religion should be a free choice.

Man should be free to choose his own religion according to his liking and intellectual capacity. To follow a religion blindly without any understanding would deprive the religion of its spiritual value and the follower

his human dignity. Human beings have intelligence and common sense to differentiate between what is right and wrong. They can adapt themselves according to circumstances. They should therefore choose a religion that is suitable to them and one that meets with their human intelligence. They must be properly guided and then given a chance to decide freely without any coercion.

The Middle-Way

The religion that is being introduced here is a practical educational system for mental culture which was revealed to the world some twenty five centuries ago by a **Fully Enlightened** and Compassionate Teacher. This religion is also known as the “**Middle-Way**, a righteous way of life, an ethico-philosophical system and a religion of freedom and reason.” It teaches us to do three main things; namely, “**Keep away from bad deeds, do good and purify the mind.**”

This message is very simple, meaningful and practical, yet people experience difficulties when they put them into practice due to inherent human weakness. The moral conduct of man plays a most important part in this religion. Its great Teacher once said, “**My teaching is not to come and believe, but to come, see and practise.**” It encourages people to study the teachings fully and so allow them to use their own judgement to decide as to whether they should accept the teachings or otherwise. No one is asked to come and embrace this

religion without first having an understanding of its teachings.

Superfluous rites and rituals have no real religious value or significance. There are no superstitious beliefs and practices or secret doctrines in this religion. Everything is open to the choice of followers who are at liberty to investigate the teachings and ask questions whenever they wish to clear their doubts. According to the founder of this religion, one should not believe anything merely because a great sage has introduced it or because it is traditionally accepted by many but one should use one's common sense and intelligence and accept it only if it is worth while to do so.

This religion teaches the Noble Eight Fold Path which consists of Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. This unique middle way allows others to lead a noble and peaceful life.

The middle way is neither a metaphysical path nor a ritualistic path; neither dogmatism nor scepticism; neither self-indulgence nor self mortification; neither eternalism nor nihilism; neither pessimism nor optimism; it is a path of Enlightenment, a means of deliverance from suffering. This religion does not agree that human beings are suffering today because of the sins committed by their ancestors; on the contrary every person carries his or her merits or demerits individually. Man himself is solely responsible for his own pain or pleasure.

One who follows the middle path of moderation should find real peace and happiness and should be able to lead a respectable life without being a slave to one's senses, thus contributing to the peace and harmony of the world.

Reap what you Sow

This religion satisfies man's most profound and lofty aspirations and yet is able to bear the stress and strain of man's everyday life, helping him in his contact with his fellow men, besides giving a purpose in life. It does not instill fear in people. **"Good begets good and bad begets bad."** **"Every action has its reaction."** These are universal laws. This religion fully agrees with these laws, hence people have to **"reap what they sow."** Evil deeds are perpetrated by people due to their greed, anger and ignorance. Such weaknesses can only be overcome through self realisation. Pleasure and pain which people experience in this world are not due to some external influences but due to the good and bad actions, words and deeds which they themselves have committed. For this very reason, this religion says: **"We are the results of what we were, and we will be the results of what we are."**

According to this teaching, cause and effect play a very important part in our lives. In a circle of cause and effect a first cause is inconceivable for the cause ever becomes the effect and the effect in turn becomes the cause.

A Great Teacher

The founder of this unique religion is not a myth but a Great Teacher who actually lived in this world. He never tried to present himself as a supernatural being but as a human being who had realised the absolute truth namely, the secret of life and the real cause of suffering and happiness. Today this Teacher is not only honoured by hundreds of millions of his followers but also by every cultured and intellectual man throughout the world. This Noble Man, this Liberator, this Social Reformer, this Democrat and Inspirer into higher living, passed away at the age of eighty leaving behind a noble code for humanity to utilise as a means for the elimination of human suffering, misery, tension, fear and worry. This code enables them to gain happiness in this life and the life hereafter and leads to the ultimate liberation of all human suffering.

This Great Teacher comforted the bereaved by His consoling words. He helped the poor that were neglected. He ennobled the lives of the deluded and purified the corrupted lives of criminals. He encouraged the feeble, united the divided, enlightened the ignorant, clarified the mystic, elevated the base and dignified the noble. Both rich and poor, saints and criminals loved Him alike. Despotic and righteous Kings, famous and obscure princes and nobles, generous and stingy millionaires, haughty and humble scholars, destitutes, paupers, down-trodden scavengers, wicked murderers, despised courtesans — all benefitted from His words of wisdom

and compassion and led peaceful, noble lives.

His noble example was a source of inspiration to all. His serene and peaceful countenance was indeed a soothing sight to the troubled eyes of men. His message of peace and tolerance was welcomed by all with indescribable joy and was of eternal benefit to everyone who had the fortune to hear and practise it. His iron will, profound wisdom, universal love, boundless compassion, selfless service, historic renunciation, perfect purity, magnetic personality, exemplary methods employed to introduce His Teachings and His final success — all these factors have inspired about one fifth of the population of the world today to hail this teacher and to honour him as their supreme religious master.

This noble Teacher sacrificed his worldly pleasures for the sake of suffering humanity to seek the Truth in order to show the path of deliverance from suffering. He visited the poor people whilst kings and ministers visited him. For forty five years after his enlightenment he had dedicated his life for enlightening misguided human beings.

This great Teacher feared none nor did He instill fear in anyone. This is one of the principles that should be cultivated in this war-torn world of ours where the most precious thing – **life** – is sacrificed at the altar of brute force and where armaments are creating fear, tension and hatred.

He was the perfect scientist in the field of life. He was the perfect psychologist who was able to analyse

the real nature of the mind — so much so that His teaching was acclaimed as the only scientific religion.

To great philosophers and unbiased thinkers, He is a teacher who understood worldly conditions in its proper perspective. To moralists He has the highest code of discipline and He symbolizes perfection. 'He was the perfect model of all the virtues he preached.' To rationalists, He is the most liberal — minded religious teacher who appreciated the vexed human problems. To free-thinkers, He is a religious teacher who encouraged people to think freely without depending on religious dogmas. To agnostics, He is a very kind, understanding and wise man.

He was no doubt the most persuasive of all the religious Teachers. He never used compulsion or fear as a means of gaining converts. He has introduced a religious way of life for people to be religious even without the attachment of a religious label.

He was the humble servant of humanity, unperturbed by either praise or blame, and undeterred even by the most acute illness.

Peace, Happiness and Salvation

This Great Teacher has shown the path to peace, happiness and salvation. His way of teaching is liberal, rational, scientific and understandable, leading towards enlightenment.

Today the message of peace of this Great Universal Teacher is more important than ever before especially at

a time when human beings are intoxicated with anger, greed, jealousy, pride and desire for world domination.

This Teacher was born to this world to dispel the darkness of ignorance and to save the world from its ills. Throughout the world many people live on without believing or practising any form of religion. However if they would only take a little bit of trouble to study and understand what this Great Teacher had taught, they could easily clarify their doubts, if any, and be convinced as to the religion that could best contribute to man's happiness.

Whether one believes in Him or not, His Teaching nevertheless has its profound effect on all people. His message was given to the world without any violence nor was a single drop of blood ever shed in its name. This is a remarkable record in world history which could be imprinted in letters of gold. This teaching illuminates the way by which mankind could cross from a world of unsatisfactoriness to a new world of light, love, peace, happiness and satisfaction.

The twenty five century old teaching of this great Teacher is strong enough to face any challenge without reversing or having to give new interpretations to its original doctrines. This teaching can be accepted without fear of being contradicted by modern scientific discoveries and achievements.

The teaching considers virtue as being one of the necessary prerequisites for the attainment of salvation. The other prerequisite is wisdom. Virtue and wisdom

could also be compared to the eyes and feet of a man. Virtue is like a vehicle that brings man up to the gate of salvation, but the actual key that opens the gate is wisdom.

Heavenly Bliss

The followers of this religion do not regard themselves as being the only chosen people who could get the chance to attain heavenly bliss. They believe that man creates his own hell or heaven according to his way of life and that sufferings in hell or realization of heavenly bliss can be experienced in this earthly life instead of in the life hereafter, as commonly believed. This religious teacher never tried to introduce his teaching by frightening people through hell fire or by tempting them with everlasting heavenly life but by revealing the truth. In accordance with these teachings, anyone can enjoy heavenly bliss so long as one leads a righteous way of life. Heaven is not reserved for or to be monopolized by any one particular sect or religious community. It should be open to all — anyone who leads a noble life.

Tolerance, patience and understanding are worthy virtues upheld by the followers of this religion. Loving kindness, compassion and sympathy towards others are not limited to human beings only but extended to all living beings — since destruction of life, be it human or animal, is cruel and unjust, and is against the teaching of this religion.

This religion also advises its followers to respect

other people's views in order to lead a harmonious life.

Way of Life

This religion is clear, reasonable and gives complete answers to all important aspects and questions about our life. It provides a solid foundation to help mankind towards a positive and better way of life.

This religion does not divide mankind into groups, the “**saved**” and the “**lost**” but as a civilized and understanding religion it teaches us how to tame the wild and refine the tamed.

Followers of this religion do not indulge in petitional or intercessory prayer. They believe in the importance of self-exertion and in the efficacy of meditation that leads one to self conquest, self-control, self purification, relief and enlightenment because meditation serves as a tonic both of the heart and the mind.

Man can mould his Life

This religion contends that mind is the all powerful force — the creator and destroyer of man and the architect of man's fate. Therefore, man should be capable of moulding anything if only he knows how to develop and make use of his mind properly.

In fact this religion has been an admirable lighthouse for guiding mankind towards peace, happiness and eternal bliss. It is true that the world today is riddled with racial, political, religious, communal and ideological misunderstandings. To solve these complex

problems, people must exercise the spirit of benevolence and tolerance towards each other, and this can be cultivated under the guidance of this religion which inculcates ethical-moral co-operation for universal good. Man must come to realize that spiritual development is more important than the attainment of material development for the real happiness and welfare of mankind. He must also practise truth, service, charity and love if this world is to be turned into a better place to live in.

Actuality

This religious teacher through his enlightenment, declared that:—

- The greatest virtue is that gained in the cultivation of universal love;
- The supreme happiness is the happiness derived from mental tranquility;
- The absolute truth is the truth acquired through the understanding of the causes of human suffering;
- The highest religion is the religion that teaches intellectual development, morality and mental purification;
- The greatest philosophy is the philosophy that introduces a practical way of life that can be followed without depending on theories and mere beliefs.

This religion does not obstruct anyone from reading and learning the teachings of other religions, and allows no place for fanaticism. A fanatic cannot allow himself to be guided by reason or even by the scientific principle of observation and analysis. Therefore, the follower of this religion is a free man with an open mind and is not subservient to anyone for his spiritual development.

If you care to learn a little more of the religious discipline or moral code of ethics and mental training of this religion you would have to withdraw any previous misunderstandings you have had about this religion. One should not merely judge the value of a religion by just observing certain practices performed by some misguided followers; instead one should always try to understand the fundamental teachings of that religion.

Credit to Man's Intelligence

Instead of placing man and his destiny under the arbitrary control of an unknown external agency and making him subservient to such a supreme power, this religion raised the status of mankind and accorded man the credit due to him for his intelligence. It taught him how to cultivate his submerged human potential.

This religion teaches us how to render selfless service to others. Followers of this religion abstain from evil not because of fear of retribution from some unseen being but because of realisation that evil would bring about suffering to living beings.

Their motive of doing good to help others is not to please any supreme being in expectation of a reward, but due to feelings of compassion and to release them from sufferings.

Here in this religion you can find a way to perfect goodness and wisdom without any aid from any external power. You can achieve the highest wisdom through realization but not necessarily through 'revelation'. You can attain redemption without the assistance of a vicarious redeemer. You can gain salvation within this lifetime by the judicious exercise of your own faculties without waiting for it to happen only in the life hereafter. This religion teaches that man is not for religion but that religion is for man. That means: **without becoming a slave to any religion, man must try to make use of a religion for his betterment and liberation.**

Is it Possible?

- Without sensuous pleasures would life be endurable?
- Without belief in immortality can man be moral?
- Without any aid from an external agency can man advance towards righteousness?
- Without rites and rituals can man lead a religious life?
- Without emotional faiths and beliefs can man practise a religion?
- Without suffering through certain religious penances can man attain his liberation?

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- Without creating fear in the mind can man follow certain religious principles?
- Without using force and threatening others can we introduce a proper religion?
- Without superstitious beliefs and dogmatic ideas in the name of religion is it possible to convince the masses to lead a religious life?
- Can a man appreciate and inspire a religion without mysticism, occultism and priest craft?

“Yes,” said the founder of this religion; these ends could be attained by service, by purity, discipline and wisdom.

The realization of the law of cause and effect as explained in this religion clarifies and helps to solve the problems of human sufferings, the mystery of fate and predestination, and above all the inequality of mankind. Understanding of this law gives them consolation, hope, self-reliance and moral courage.

Modern Religion

This is not a theory or a religion just to believe in but a practical and noble way of life. This is one of the oldest religions in history that brought culture and betterment to mankind, yet most modern in every aspect, when compared with modern achievements. It advises one not to become a slave to any external power but to cultivate one's own hidden potential and use one's own effort and intelligence to resolve one's problems.

It has every quality required of a rational religion that will fit into the present and future world. It is rational, progressive and reasonable. It will be beneficial for anyone to study and realize the value of this religion in the modern world. It is acknowledged to be more scientific than science and more progressive than all the progressive elements in the spiritual field. It is one of the most effective means to be utilised for the maintenance of world peace, harmony and understanding.

No Discrimination

It was this religion which, for the first time in world history, revolted against the degrading caste system and taught equality of mankind, according equal opportunities for all to distinguish themselves in every walk of life. It was also this religion that first gave freedom to women by encouraging them to study and practise a religion that bestowed social equalities.

The Great Teacher declared that the gates to success and prosperity were open to all in every condition of life whether high or low, saint or criminal, who would care, seek and aspire for perfection. He did not force his followers to be slaves either to Himself or His teachings but granted them complete freedom of thought and investigation so that they could gain self-confidence.

This religion classifies the living being into mind and matter which are in a state of constant change, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. Mind

and matter arise and perish and the cycles go on. Therefore nothing will remain permanently either in this world or elsewhere in the universe. Because everything which exists in any part of the universe is nothing but a combination of elements and energies, it is quite natural that these things will one day disintegrate and the formations disappear totally. This religion also teaches us that every existing component thing is subject to changes and conflicts owing to worldly conditions or universal laws.

The principles observed by this religion are not commandments. By observing the precepts such as abstaining from Killing, Stealing, Sexual Misconduct, Telling Lies and Taking Intoxicating Drinks, the followers can purify themselves and enable others to live peacefully.

Our Aim

Our aim in publishing this book is not to convert others into our faith but to enlighten them on how to seek peace and happiness and to practise their own religious convictions without resorting to blind faith. We encourage every person to practise his own religion properly if he can truly find truth, peace, happiness, wisdom and salvation in it. What we want is for man to lead a respectable religious life without abusing his human dignity.

However, this religion may be the answer to many of your religious, spiritual and human problems or it may

give fresh direction to your thinking on religious and philosophical matters. It may also help you to understand the way of life and cultural heritage of Asia. You may find in this religion the spiritual guidance the modern world needs.

This religion brought into the world a new spirit, a new hope, a new path, the truth of which and the necessity of which is seen and felt today as of old. The great religion referred to is “Buddhism” and its founder is none other than “Gautama The Buddha.”

Whatever may be your purpose, we invite you to take a closer look at this religion and the ideals of the founder. We are ready to help you in your search for truth. Therefore, Be Unbiased, Avoid Religious Prejudices, Try to Find the Truth. ■